

Regional Environmental Governance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Theoretical Issues,  
Comparative Designs (REGov)

## Environmental governance in the Baltic Sea Region and the role of non-governmental actors

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the emergent role of environmental non-governmental actors in regional environmental governance. The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is taken as an example where changes in environmental governance and where several different international regimes and transnational policy emerged. The paper analyses transnationalization, Europeanization tendencies and largely fragmented existing governance structure. However, one sociological issue has been rarely analysed in these discussions. The question of identity as the main driver for regional governance to move forward will be touched on at the end of this paper.

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*Keywords:* Environmental governance; Non-governmental actors; Baltic Sea Region.

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### 1. Introduction

Non-governmental actors can be differentiated at levels ranging from local to national, regional or global. They are playing an increasingly large role in policy-making, in stimulating international conventions, drafting treaties, providing scientific information and monitoring implementation. They can also be critical in environmental policy implementation. Not only has the number of non-state actors influencing the environmental governance system increased but, these actors have also become more diverse and varied in their interests and in the ways they influence the system. Stable, credible and adaptive global environmental governance requires the acceptance and involvement of national governments, their bureaucracies, and the growing population of non-state actors. The same might be applicable to the regional environmental governance. Regional environmental governance structures are a part of an environmental governance architecture spanning the local and the global levels (Esty, 1999). This paper investigates the emergent role of environmental non-governmental actors in regional environmental governance.

The analysis starts from the assumption that environmental non-governmental actors might have an influential role in regional environmental governance, as well as on national authorities, only if the governance pattern is ready to accept them and the fragmentation is nonexistent. Otherwise all the efforts made by actors might be wasteful. The Baltic Sea Region (BSR) is taken as an example where changes in environmental governance and where several

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different international regimes and transnational policy emerged. The importance of national government and governance in the Baltic Sea Region has declined and the region is now defined and executed in new modes and arrangements beyond the nation-state (Rosenau, 1999). There appear to be many changes in the past decades towards the transnationalization of the Baltic Sea Region, because tasks are transferred from governmental to non-governmental and sub-national actors, and towards the Europeanization the Baltic Sea Region (Kern & Löffelsend, 2004). The first question of this paper is: do and, if so, how do these two tendencies change the role of environmental non-governmental actors in the region?

However, the key problem in the region is not a lack of existing initiatives or governance structures. It is rather the failure of largely fragmented existing governance structures to provide an appropriate framework in which all the actors could take part in and have power to act effectively. However, one sociological issue has been rarely analysed in these discussions. The question of identity as the main driver for regional governance to move forward will be touched on at the end of this paper.

Firstly, the characteristics of the environmental governance system in the Baltic Sea Region are outlined: the history and the development of the present governmental levels. According to the scientific literature it is highly fragmented and encompasses many different actors and networks as well as several different regimes. Next different types of actors participating in the regional governance are presented. This is exemplified via the analysis of qualitative data of a few non-governmental organizations. Finally, the discussion on some sociological issues is presented. And the author turns the discussion to collective identity as a significant precondition for successful regional governance.

## 2. The Baltic Sea Region and the environmental governance

The region can be understood in several ways such as political, economical or geographical. Geographically the region very often is defined accordingly its drainage basin. It would be wise to define the Baltic Sea region geographically when we speak about environmental protection. It makes sense to include not only the coasts of the sea but also the inland connected to the sea through waterways and rivers, so called the drainage basin of the sea. In fact, the Baltic Sea Region contains nine coastal states and five inland states with larger or smaller areas draining to the Baltic Sea. Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden are the nine coastal states. In addition to these we also find Belarus with almost half its area in the basin, and smaller parts from Ukraine, Czech and Slovak republics draining through Poland in the south, and very small parts of Norway draining through Sweden in the west (Ryden, 2002). Environmental protection of the common sea is an important concern for the inhabitants of the region and if they wish to protect their common water they have to co-operate.

Table 1. Traditional multilevel governance in the Baltic Sea Region

Level	Actors
Global	Supranational coop.: Global Environmental Facility
EU.	Commission, EU funding programmes
National	Intergovernmental cooperation: NCoM, CBSS, BSPP, BCoM
Local	Sub-national coop.: The Union of the Baltic Cities

Co-operation for the environmental protection in the Baltic Sea Region has a long history. Since the early 1970s, when the global environmental debate began to take off, countries in the north of the Baltic Sea took advantage of the opportunity to continue the debates beyond the borders. It was a big step as the diplomacy of The Cold War was still very inert. It should be taken into account that each country around the Baltic Sea had a very different pattern. For a long period the Baltic Sea was not a unified region in organising the national governance. The south-eastern shore of the Sea was composed of the German Democratic Republic, Poland and the Soviet Union. Germany has a

federal structure; the Baltic States have experienced dramatic changes in their political scene in the recent history and are now still rebuilding their administrative, economical and other capacities. Poland as well has experienced deep changes although maintaining its national sovereignty. Only the Nordic Countries have enjoyed a long and stable evolution of a unitarian nation-state model. Despite the political history of these countries, all different actors participating in the BSR environmental governance now face a similar dilemma despite the national differences.

The traditional governance in the Baltic Sea Region has a vertical multilevel governance model, where four different levels exist: global institutions, EU institutions, cooperation of national and local governments (Table 1). General analysis of the development of these layers is presented in the next sub-sections.

### *2.1. The intergovernmental co-operation in the BSR environmental governance*

For a very long time significant political and economic discrepancies were apparent in the Baltic Sea Region. Nevertheless the institutionalization of the international policy regime for environmental purposes began more than 30 years ago. All the sources of pollution around the entire sea were made the subject of a single convention for the first time ever in 1974 when the seven Baltic coastal states signed the convention of the protection of the Baltic Sea – the Baltic Sea Convention. The organization set up to work with it is the Helsinki Commission, also known as HELCOM, or Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission, 1992). The convention was marked by intergovernmental co-operation between the participating nation-states. Dominant actors within this intergovernmental co-operation were governments of the coastal countries. Meanwhile, NGOs and sub-national actors were not directly involved in decision making but they had obtained the observer status (Oberthur et al., 2002).

The common sea was also a priority when the geo-political framework changed significantly in 1990. After political changes, when new-born Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania emerged in the regional policymaking, Swedish and Polish prime ministers invited all states around the Baltic Sea to a meeting to support and extend the co-operation in the region. An important achievement was the improvement and extension of the Baltic Sea Convention. A new convention, called the Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, was signed in 1992 by all the states bordering the Baltic Sea. The Convention covers the whole of the Baltic Sea area, including inland waters and the water of the sea itself, as well as the seabed. Measures are also taken in the whole catchment area of the Baltic Sea to reduce land-based pollution (Helsinki Commission, 1992). This second convention considerably expanded the environmental governance system of the Baltic Sea Region.

It should be noted that after 1990 the number of organizations and networks has emerged abruptly in the Baltic Sea Region as it was a response to the geopolitical changes. In particular, the changes in the global environmental governance, when the number of global conventions was adopted after the Rio conference in 1992, influenced the governance in the Baltic Sea Region. For instance, the Baltic 21 is a regional expression of the global Agenda 21 adopted by the United Nations at the Rio conference.

After the changes in 1990 the intergovernmental structure of the environmental governance of the Baltic Sea was formed and now there are three sets of governmental-parliamentary co-operations:

- The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council. As mentioned previously, the northern countries have enjoyed a long and stable evolution of their internal politics as well as external co-operation among each other. The first step towards the current political co-operation in the form of the Nordic Council was taken after the World War II when the Nordic Council was formed in 1952. It is the Nordic parliamentary co-operation forum. The Council acts as an advisory body for the Nordic governments.

The Nordic Council of Ministers, which is an equivalent co-operation between the Nordic governments, was established in 1971. The Nordic Council of Ministers is the Nordic governments' co-operation forum ([www.norden.org](http://www.norden.org)).

- The Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference (BSPC). CBSS was established by the region's Foreign Ministers in Copenhagen in 1992. CBSS is an overall political forum for the regional intergovernmental cooperation. The members of the Council are the 11 states of the Baltic Sea region as well as the European Commission (CBSS, 1992).

BSPC was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue between parliamentarians from the Baltic Sea Region. BSPC unites parliamentarians from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and 5 parliamentary organizations around the Baltic Sea. The BSPC thus constitutes a unique parliamentary bridge between all the EU and non-EU countries of the Baltic Sea Region ([www.bspc.net](http://www.bspc.net)).

- Baltic Council of Ministers and the Baltic Assembly. The Baltic Assembly is an international organisation that aims to promote co-operation between the parliaments of the Republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It attempts to find a common position in relation to many international issues, including economic, political and environmental issues.

During the first years of the Baltic Assembly activity, it became apparent that there is a need for closer links between it and the governments of the Baltic States, as well as for a specific procedure for ensuring regular contacts between legislative and executive bodies of the three states. As a result, an agreement on the Baltic Parliamentary and Governmental Cooperation between the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia and the Republic of Lithuania was signed in 1994. The Agreement specified the responsibilities of the Baltic Assembly and those of the Baltic Council of Ministers (<http://www.baltasam.org/>).

These three two-dimensional policy co-operations form the backbone of the Baltic Sea intergovernmental co-operation. Certainly, these organizations do not only focus on environmental issues but the environmental protection is one of their key topics.

## *2.2. Environmental governance in the Baltic Sea Region: supranational, EU and sub-national levels*

The other major change in the regional governance of the Baltic Sea is observable through the expansion of the European Union (EU). When the first convention of the protection of the Baltic Sea was signed 36 years ago, the area was dominated by nation states and the Baltic Sea countries was largely outside the EU's horizon; only Denmark and (West) Germany were members of the EU. Two decades later the political situation has changed drastically.

In 2004, the EU saw its biggest enlargement to date that had a significant effect not only on the whole Union but on the BSR as well. Since the accession of the three Baltic States and Poland, the Baltic Sea has been almost entirely surrounded by the countries of the EU: eight out of nine coastal states are now EU members. This expansion led to the Europeanization of the Baltic Sea Area. Since then the governance of the BSR has been strongly influenced by the EU through European regulations and different regional policy instruments for various environmental projects in the area. (Kern & Löffelsend, 2004). The EU also contributes to the development of the BSR environmental policy through funding or involvement in the decision making process of the related actors, such as HELCOM.

The only remaining non-EU areas are the Russian urban area of Saint Petersburg and the Kaliningrad Oblast exclave. Presently Russia is a full member of HELCOM, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, and a few other intergovernmental bodies in the region. Consequently the EU cannot apply internal policy for the protection of the Baltic Sea environment as Russia is the one that holds the key to long-term success, especially in terms of environmental protection (Bengtsson, 2009). The starting point is that Russia as a non-EU country cannot become a member of internal EU regimes, therefore special arrangements are needed. Although this situation is extremely important for the governance of the Baltic Sea environment and requires further deeper insight, it is out of the scope of this paper.

Sub-national governments have also started to co-operate in an effort to preserve the natural environment of the Baltic Sea, which has also contributed to the shift in the BSR environmental policy. This type of co-operation is not related to national governmental cooperation and consists merely of sub-national governments. With the increasing limitation of national steering capacities, the municipalities' scope of action is increasing. This gives towns and cities the opportunity to enter the European and international political arena and emerge as global players. Moreover, their participation is often actively supported by international and supranational bodies such as the European Commission (Kern & Löffelsend, 2004). Well known co-operation among the cities around the Baltic Sea is the Union of the Baltic Cities – a voluntary, proactive network mobilizing the shared potential of over 100 member cities for democratic, economic, social, cultural and environmentally sustainable development of the BSR. The Union of the Baltic Cities has members in all nine coastal countries surrounding the Baltic Sea and in Norway ([www.ubc.net/](http://www.ubc.net/)).

There are more examples of the sub-national co-operation in the BSR. For instance, a political network of regional authorities below the national level is the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation (BSSSC). This network was established to improve the collaboration in the BSR, to represent the interests of the sub-regions towards national as well as European and international organisations. More than 100 sub-regions, (counties, länder, oblasts, etc.), regularly participate in the annual conferences of the BSSSC ([www.bsssc.com](http://www.bsssc.com)).

Baltic Metropolises Network (BaltMet) represents another forum for capitals and large metropolitan cities around the Baltic Sea to co-operate. It brings together eleven member cities for joint work. The main goal of the network is to promote innovativeness and competitiveness in the BSR by engaging cities, as well as academic and business partners, into close cooperation. Sustainable development is one of the main goals in the action plan of the network (Baltic Metropolises Network, 2002).

These empirical cases are great examples of a successful sub-national governance form – governance without states. The intergovernmental level seems to be no longer sufficient for the successful implementation of environmental policy. New actors in the management of the Baltic Sea area definitely weaken but have not replaced the key role that nation states play in the regional governance; the governance structure of the BSR rests on the authority of the states. First of all, states constitute and practice the highest level of political authority. Second, states provide the network of legally binding international treaties that give the basic framework for sub-national actors, and so for the other actors as well. Nonetheless, institutions like the Union of the Baltic Cities or the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation have a possibility to develop agency without national governments and participate in the policy formation and play a role in decision-making processes. This type of co-operation is the best opportunity for towns and cities to enter other, different political levels, such as the EU or the international political arena.

The BSR is influenced by the global changes and the global environmental governance too. The highest level in administrative terms there is a supranational level. Clearly the governance in the BSR is influenced by the globally accepted treaties or other instruments. This is especially because of the presence of EU which participates in the global environmental governance very actively and the BSR countries are the EU members. It's worth mentioning that several international organizations and international financial institutions are active in the BSR. For instance, GRID-Arendal is an official United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) collaborating centre, supporting informed decision making and awareness-raising and they are based in Norway. The Global Environmental Facility funds the environmental projects in the East Europe, and so in the Baltic States ([www.thegef.org/gef](http://www.thegef.org/gef)).

To sum up, we can observe the changing governance architecture in the BSR. Originally, the governance of the Baltic Sea was based on governments of the coastal countries. Some global organizations and global governance instruments intervene within the environmental system of the BSR as well. But in fact, the most significant change happened after the EU enlargement by three Baltic countries and Poland in 2004. Sub-national co-operation forms another level in the environmental governance too. This type of co-operation emerged after the political changes in 1990. Networks consist of sub-national governments and participate in the environmental policy arena in the Region.



### 3. Non-state actors in the environmental governance

In recent years many non-governmental actors have emerged in the global and regional environmental governance. Non-governmental organizations, also known as "nonprofit," "non-governmental," or "civil society" organizations, have long functioned as providers of recreational and education activities in different societies, but they have grown in importance over the past decades (Toepler, 2003). Environmental challenges of our time and rising public consciousness resulted in a mushrooming of non-governmental organizations. Environmental non-governmental organisations and research bodies have been increasingly co-operating over the past several decades, and the result has been the development of a number of functioning networks as citizens have sought to take a more direct part in environmental problem-solving and public affairs. Actors at all levels of governance have stepped in to fill the gap where the national government or international co-operation has not been able to respond or respond effectively to environmental problems (Biermann et. al., 2009). Environmental change and rising awareness challenges the capacity of traditional state structures to respond to these changes and public pressure. Besides, this capacity varies greatly among nation-states. Evident, the state capabilities are no longer sufficient to cope on its own with many environmental problems and promote sustainable development.

From the institutional point of view, the traditional vertical multilevel governance has been supplemented with a new horizontal dimension. At the international level different actors participate in different governance levels from global to intergovernmental and national organisations.

Civil society actors or non-governmental organizations are different from private actors. Former are environmentalist groups or scientific networks, and the latter are merely private actors, such as business associations. The emerging phenomenon is a growing number of the latter. Private companies are realizing that the future of their business depends on the future of their environment. In the famous NGO WWF website ([www.panda.org/](http://www.panda.org/)) we can find plenty of examples how IKEA company has invested some 1.5 million Euro in promoting sustainable forestry in Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries to secure long-term wood supplies. About the Coca-Cola company which has committed to neutralizing its water footprint worldwide. There are plenty of examples which show that the awareness of private sector towards the nature conservation is increasing.

The appearance of private actors reveals through sustainable private investments or internal companies' policies as mentioned above. Even more, this appearance discloses through the institutionalized form – private actors participate in environmental transnational organizations. This results from a variety of norm and rule systems on the global level, from reporting schemes to certification and various management standards. And it mostly exists outside the international setting. The impact of these private actors on the world or regional politics has changed. They became more significant at the international system and they started to set up rules (Pattberg, 2005).

Involvement of the business sector in international environmental negotiations is relatively recent phenomenon. At the domestic level, private companies operates from a combination of motives and may often favour international regulations for obtaining market advantage. But at the international level with global competitors companies' motives to participate in international environmental arena are for reducing uncertainty or even out of genuine concern for the environment. First, this involvement reflects the corporate sector's desire for uniform and regular international standards (DeSombre, 2000). Second, for several global environmental issues such as climate change, ozone depletion and biodiversity protection most political activity has been initiated and debated at the international level. Many industries now feel they ignore international environmental negotiations at their risk, and some feel that they may positively benefit from them (Pulver, 2002).

Finally, and especially with dissatisfaction over the outcomes of environmental diplomacy, more and more attention is being paid to the role that industry plays in developing its own governance regimes, or governance regimes in partnership with civil society actors. These private or public-private governance regimes often build around voluntary eco-labelling or certification processes are particularly prevalent in the forestry and chemicals sectors (O'Neill, 2009), but more often they emerge in other sectors including the fishing industry or other commodities such as palm oil, coffee, etc. The most prominent example of private actors is Forest Stewardship

Council, the organization established by private companies, though the creation of this organization was encouraged by non-governmental organizations.

To summarize, the recent phenomenon is the rising number of civil society and private actors participating in the environmental governance. The co-operation of one state with another is no longer sufficient as plethora of different actors has to be accepted in the environmental governance system.

### *3.1. Non-state actors in the environmental governance of the Baltic Sea Region*

As it was mentioned previous, stable, credible and adaptive global environmental governance requires the acceptance and involvement of national governments, their bureaucracies, and the growing population of non-state actors. It is obvious that the same suits for the Baltic Sea regional environmental governance. We can observe the same trend of changing situation in the region as in the global arena, where the number of new actors has come out.

Sustainable development in the region can only be guaranteed through a combination of national governance and new modes of governance that reach beyond the nation state (Kern & Löffelsend, 2004). Rising awareness of the civil society and local governments towards the present state of the Baltic Sea environment has contributed to initiatives and a shift in environmental policy and administration of the Baltic Sea. After 1990 intergovernmental cooperation was supplemented with more actors – different actors from governments, business associations, NGOs and epistemic communities. Notably, this rising public awareness has contributed to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters that was created within the framework of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and adopted in 1998 (UNECE, 1998). The origins of the Convention date back to 1992, the year the Rio Declaration was drawn up. In Article 10, the Declaration states that “environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level” (UNCED, 1992). Meanwhile, the Aarhus convention pays a special attention to non-governmental organizations and supports the participation of these actors in the planning activities and environmental governance in general.

In this period, governmental, non-governmental and sub-national actors started to play similar roles within international policy networks as these entire actor groups started to participate in the decision making and policy implementation. The mode of governance has changed in the region because of new, different actors groups and the participation of these groups in intergovernmental organizations. As an example of co-operation between governmental and non-governmental actors is the Baltic 21 or Helsinki Convention Commission. Baltic 21 is based on the close cooperation of governmental and non-governmental actors. This way the legitimacy and the compliance with Commission’s decisions are enhanced. Helsinki Convention Commission has slightly transformed its internal system and non-governmental actors gained at least limited access to these traditional forms of international governance (Joas et. al., 2007).

In addition to these collaborations, new non-governmental actors operate in the Region as well. These are coalitions of older NGOs or completely new organizations. Most prominent partnership between NGOs is the Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB). In 1990, non-governmental environmental organizations from the countries of the BSR united and established CCB in order to co-operate in activities concerning the Baltic Sea. At present, CCB unites 27 member organizations from Finland, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Denmark, Ukraine and Sweden. The CCB member organisations combined have over half a million members in all countries around the Baltic Sea. The main goal of CCB is to promote the protection and improvement of the Baltic Sea environment and natural resources ([www.ccb.se](http://www.ccb.se)). Being an international network organization, CCB has the advantage of being able to work both at the international and national policy levels.

The Baltic Sea Forum is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation which supports the economical, political and cultural co-operation in the Baltic Sea region. It supports the co-operation with the Baltic States as well as with the whole Baltic region. The Baltic Sea Forum has an extended network of members, representatives and partners from all fields of activity in the Baltic region and Central Europe. The objectives encompass political consultations,

offer an independent platform and network that facilitate the exchange of experiences, opinions and ideas to the Baltic Sea region, etc. ([www.baltic-sea-forum.org](http://www.baltic-sea-forum.org)). This type of co-operation adds the value to the traditional governance system as it brings there different people and they have an opportunity to participate. In this way the democratization is exercised as well.

The Baltic Sea Tourism Commission is an example of the public-private actor. This non-profit organisation, created by the countries around the Baltic Sea promotes the natural and sustainable development of travel and tourism within and to the Baltic Sea region ([www.balticsea.com](http://www.balticsea.com)). These organizations have a power in a way that they can work through lobbying; to raise public awareness through information, environmental education and other activities; and through concrete mutual projects in the environmental protection and governance field.

The new governance in the BSR means that the traditional vertical multilevel governance model of supranational, EU, national and local levels is supplemented by a new horizontal dimension: civil society, private or private-public actors. There are civil society organisations, business representatives, etc. This combined governance is a challenge to the intergovernmental co-operations and in particular to national governments.

#### **4. BSR environmental governance and the identity question**

The importance of national governments and intergovernmental co-operations in the BSR has declined as new modes and arrangements beyond the nation-state emerged. There have emerged plenty of non-governmental initiatives in the region, which means new actors and new governance levels. The findings of Newig and Fritsch (2009) based on a big number of case studies suggest that “the number of governance levels involved strongly correlates with environmental output quality, while the number of agencies shows a slightly weaker, but still clear, correlation to the quality of policy outputs”. Basically it means that better quality of the environment can be reached when more levels of the governance are involved in the environmental policy. The interaction between local, regional and supranational actors contributes to a shared understanding of the problems and leads to better results. In addition, if more actors are involved, better policy implementation we can have because thanks to a number of different actors the compliance with policy goals is guaranteed. Hence, highly polycentric governance system comprising many agencies and levels of governance yields higher environmental outputs than rather monocentric governance. This assumption proposes that because of the increased number of the governance levels (due to the expansion of EU and active sub-national actors) we have to observe the improvement of the quality of the Baltic Sea environment. However, this fact cannot be verified straight away as a natural recovery rate of the Baltic Sea ecosystem is extremely slow (Helsinki Commission, 2009). Moreover, this can be done only in the future and within interdisciplinary research where natural scientists would take part in.

The other statement of the same research says that the more actors are involved, the better policy implementation we have. The rising number of actors, participating in the BSR environmental governance, proposes us that this phenomenon will lead to better governance and finally the environmental state of the Baltic Sea as policy implementation will be enhanced. Then the question is if the environmental governance in the BSR is “good governance” with effective programmes and their implementation. However, all policy programmes have to be implemented and supported by people living in the region. Then the question arises if people are willing to do that. Shall be noted, that investigations on actors and governance often miss an analysis of one sociological factor. This is the identity issue that has been rarely analyzed in many studies of the BSR environmental governance or environmental governance in general. Social identity theory in common with sociological models emphasizes social categorization, a process of identifying oneself as a member of some category. Individuals gain a social identity and group (collective) identity by their affiliation. Collective identities refer to the idea that a group of people accept a fundamental and consequential similarity that causes them to feel solidarity amongst themselves (Thornborn, 1995; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Solidarity is an imperative for people seeking common goals. Collective identities are attached to conscious and unconscious meaning that people share. People come to identify with groups in which they are socially located. People can have multiple collective identities, such as local, regional, and national identities (Fligstein, 2010). Drawing from that regional identity would mean that people feel solidarity and affiliate



themselves with that specific region. That would definitely assist in reaching regional governmental goals. Therefore, we should raise the question if people living in the BSR affiliate themselves with that region too.

The concept of “region” has traditionally been thought of in geographical terms as a natural, real entity. The same was applied in this paper as this approach sounds most when talking about the sea water protection. But the protection of regional commons (in this case common sea) can be reached by no means if the societies living in that region do not identify themselves with the place. It means they wouldn’t have motives to seek common goals. More precisely, there wouldn’t be any regional governance goals if there wouldn’t be a common region.

Regions can be seen as products of actors’ social action or what one may call discourses or policies. Obviously, socially constructed region does not necessarily coincide with a geographical region. Such an approach opens up the debate about the existence of regions. Those who define regions have their interests, and such interpretations and the use of these views can help them to construct a specific notion of regions. In the case of the BSR countries have many multilateral political programmes; there are many governmental and non-state actors working within the region; EU has created the Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region: an integrated framework to address the challenges and opportunities of the Baltic Sea Region (Commission of the European communities, 2009). One might call all these actions as an attempt to construct the collective identity. However, the political community as a legal space with rights and duties does not provoke identification, which means that they lack meaning beyond national culture (Eder, 2009). Considerable historical and cultural distinctions of the BSR states, briefly mentioned in the beginning of this article, probably support this pronouncement. After all, there is an unanswered question if the BSR countries do have that collective identity which might be the key to the successful and effective governance. This is an implication of the theoretical assumption that regional studies cannot be limited to merely geographical or political issues. Sociological factor might be crucial as well.

## **5. Conclusions**

The traditional governance in the BSR has a vertical multilevel governance model, where four different levels exist. But the governance architecture has changed in the past decades because of the disclosure of multitude non-governmental and private actors. The new governance in the BSR means that the traditional vertical multilevel governance model of four levels is supplemented by a new horizontal dimension: civil society, private or private-public actors which are civil society organisations, business representatives, etc. This combined governance is a challenge to the intergovernmental co-operations and in particular to national governments. The co-operation of one state with another is no longer sufficient as a number of different actors had to be accepted in the governance system. Especially as non-state actors may become crucial in responding environmental problems as they disseminate the information to a broader public, they can communicate to other levels of the governance or with each other and in this way represent the ideas of the marginal groups, carry out the educational activities and most important to contribute to a better policy implementation.

The emergence of horizontal governance challenges the existing governance system by providing new resources, adding transparency and publicity, but at the same time demanding more accountability, possibility to participate and influence the outcomes of this system. Taking into consideration the multiplicity of actors involved, incorporation of new actors could ensure the flow of information, predictability and guarantee the better policy implementation. Transnationalization and Europeanization offer more space for these actors, thus the expansion of the policy area means that sub-national entities, non-governmental and private actors can enter this area and participate in European or international policies. New actors certainly improve the environmental governance of the BSR.

From general outlines of several non-governmental organizations that operate in the BSR is evident that governmental and non-governmental actors of environmental governance are much intertwined. The transformation of multi-level towards common governance can be defined. This would call for a new form of governance that would combine the traditional governance through states and all governmental co-operations and at the same time could accept a great number of different non-governmental actors. This type of governance could better reflect the

present situation and encompass sub-national entities, civil society organizations and the private actors. However, the open question is if the societies around the Baltic Sea affiliate themselves with this region and are open for common governance. To answer this, one has to analyse the social structures that develop in the Baltic Sea Region.

The conclusions to be drawn from the foregoing discussion are guidelines for further research. For the moment there are several proposals for organizing research on BSR environmental governance: explaining the turning points in the evolution of the civil society, especially business, involvement into BSR governance; explaining social relations between people, civil society organizations, economic organizations and finally nation-states that participate in the creation of the BSR environmental governance; analyzing the existence of the collective identity in the context of BSR. Deeper knowledge would let to improve the governance system to be more effective and open. Also, if there is a collective identity (or it might be created) it can definitely serve in reaching regional goals.

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